

Guidelines of Faith

by
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Nichiren Shoshu International Center

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Contents

Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
I. Some Basic Guidelines	1
Proper Attitude	3
Internal Cause and External Cause	6
Change Your Own Karma	9
Personal Wishes	12
Inconspicuous Benefits	13
Attitude during Gongyo	16
When You've Been Drinking	17
Springboard for Happiness	18
Priorities in Faith	20
Accumulate Experience	21
Unity Is Crucial	24
Complaining Solves Nothing	25
Find the Basic Cause	27
The Role of Leaders	29
Introduce Members to Seniors	32
Don't Blame Others	34

Good Influence	35
Need for Sincerity	37
Positive Attitude	40
Benefit and Loss	42
Devilish Functions	44
Refrain from <i>Onshitsu</i>	45
Proper Perspective	49
Body and Shadow	50
Aftercare Vital	51
The Best Influence	53
Compassionate Prayer	56
Harmonizing Role	57
Support Each Other	59
Never-retreating Faith	60
The Only Reliable Support	62
Correct Bad Attitude	64
Avoid Slander	66
Trouble Can Nourish Growth	67
Merciful Consideration	69
Purpose of Faith	71
Watch Warning Signs	73
Everything Is Significant to Faith	76
Reflect upon Attitude	77
"Lessening One's Karmic Retribution"	79
Curing Illness	81
Steady Course	82
The Right Direction	85
Behavior Is Important	88
Faith as the Basis	89

Divide Your Time Wisely	91
Work and Activities	95
The Purpose of Marriage	97
Ingredients of Happiness	101
Universal Peace	103
The Problem of Divorce	105
Loans between Members	106
Attitude of Leaders	111
Recognizing Devilish Functions	113
II. Key Points of Individual Guidance	115
Attitude in Faith	117
Practice	122
Relationships among Members	129
Correct Viewpoint	131
One's Way of Living	134
Changing Your Destiny	138
III. Guidance—Its Tradition and Spirit	141
Living the Teachings of True Buddhism	143
Propagation on a Person-to-Person Basis	146
The Purpose of Guidance	147
Essentials of Individual Guidance	149
Treasure Each Individual	152
Point Out the Basic Cause	156
Pray for Members' Growth	159

Foreword

“PROFESSIONAL encourager”—members call Mr. Satoru Izumi, a vice president of the Soka Gakkai and general director of the Nichiren Shoshu International Center. Wherever he goes at home and abroad, we find many people standing up and growing in faith through his encouragement. Since the early days of the Soka Gakkai, Mr. Izumi has devoted himself fully to giving guidance and encouragement to individual members, particularly troubled people. He has led most of them to happiness and prosperity by pointing out the correct way of faith and practice.

Born in 1911, Mr. Izumi graduated from the present Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. In 1940, he became a member of the Soka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society), a lay organization of Nichiren Shoshu. He is one of the pioneers who have helped build the Soka Gakkai we see today under the guidance of four successive presidents—Mr. Makiguchi, Mr. Toda, Mr. Ikeda and Mr. Hōjō. This organization now has a membership of well over ten million, with sister organizations in more than fifty countries.

Guidelines of Faith is a volume of collected guidance and encouragement Mr. Izumi has given on various occasions, formally and informally. It was originally published under the title *Shidō no Izumi* (Wellspring of Guidance) by the Seikyo Press, Tokyo, in February 1979. An English translation was serialized in the monthly *Seikyo Times* from April 1979 through July 1980. This book is a revised version of the *Seikyo Times* translation.

The reader will understand that much of Mr. Izumi's guidance is based on a Japanese frame of reference and patterns of thinking. A few parts, such as a section on "arranged marriage," were omitted, being irrelevant to Western readers. However, the basic points he makes speak to universal needs and most of the contents will be applicable to situations which believers of any country face in their everyday practice. This book will offer readers a key to solving their problems and bringing forth the power of the Buddha inherent within themselves. In his guidance, Mr. Izumi seeks to awaken people to what faith should be and enable them to establish true independence on the basis of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. We hope readers will use this book as their "guidelines of faith" and elevate their life-condition through correct practice.

October 1980

*Nichiren Shoshu International Center
Editorial Department*

Preface

I TOOK faith in Nichiren Shoshu when I was twenty-nine. At that time I was in the depths of misery. I used to think there was probably nobody in the world more unhappy than I. However, in meeting the Gohonzon, I was able to turn adversity into happiness, just like poison changed into medicine.

My mother died when I was three. My grandparents were then still relatively young. Since my father had been adopted as a husband for their daughter and was living with them, they feared that if he took a second wife, it might create discord in the family. Therefore, they decided to make me their heir. From that time on I was raised by my grandparents.

My grandfather was a very good-natured man. He had acted as guarantor for some of his friends, and when he died he left behind a huge debt. All of the family property changed hands. I was only twenty years old then.

I resented everyone and everything in the world. Why did I have to suffer such misfortune? People said that good deeds are rewarded and evil deeds are pun-

ished, but I couldn't believe it. My grandfather had lived honestly and worked hard since his youth. For generations my family had served as chief parishioners, both for the Buddhist temple and the Shinto shrine in the village. My grandfather, too, had done everything he could for the temple, for the shrine, the village, the school and so on. All this had only led to the ruin of the family.

There were no gods and no Buddhas either, I thought. Every Buddhist or Shinto priest I met said that his was the best religion in the world. To me they all seemed to be seeking only their own interests. How else could there be so many "best" religions? I gradually came to believe that the only thing I could rely on in this life was my own effort. I was later to learn that this itself was an erroneous conclusion, a reaction to the false religions of my family, but I had no way of knowing it at the time. "From today on," I told myself, "I'll save money every day, no matter how little, and depend on no one but myself." Thus I entered a new period in life.

I married, and our first child—a boy—was born. I was overjoyed, but my joy was short-lived, for our son died four days later. Earlier I had lost my mother, and now I had lost my child. Why so much misery? I kept asking myself this question. Then the following year, my wife fell ill and had to be hospitalized. There went all my hard-earned money.

My misfortunes would not cease. Our first daughter, who was born in the year that followed, turned out to have cerebral palsy. "I'm sorry, Mr. Izumi," the doctor said, "but there is no way to cure your child." I think

nothing can be more agonizing to parents than to have a sick child who goes on living, without the slightest hope of being cured.

If you are unhappy with your spouse, you can get a divorce, but you can't divorce your child, no matter how much distress that child may cause you. "Even if my daughter lives, she'll never be healthy enough to take care of herself," I would think to myself. "For her own sake, she might be better off dead. Perhaps I should take her life with my own hand, but how can a parent do such a thing?" I acutely realized what grief and anguish it is for parents to have an ailing child.

Up until then I had looked at life with an attitude of "What will be, will be." For instance, if I lost a hundred yen, I would comfort myself, saying, "Lucky it wasn't a thousand yen." Again, if I lost a thousand yen, I would find solace in the fact that it hadn't been ten thousand. Thus, whenever misery struck me, I would compare it with some other, greater, misfortune and say to myself, "Cheer up! It could have been worse."

So, when a friend of mine spoke to me about Nichiren Shoshu, I at first thought, "I don't need any religion. True, my mother died, all the family property was taken, and I lost my son. However, these are all events of the past, things which couldn't have been helped. Religion is of no use to me."

However, my palsy-stricken daughter changed my way of thinking. I could no longer say, "What will be, will be," or "Don't bother. Let things go their own way." I had a child with a disease which the doctor had pronounced incurable. I would try everything—any-

thing—which people suggested might help, I decided. Then, even if my daughter were to die, I could say to her, “I’ve done everything a parent could. I’ve made sure you had all the medical care available, I’ve tried whatever people said might help for your illness. There is nothing more I can do for you. Please resign yourself to your fate.”

My friend kept coming and talking to me about Nichiren Shoshu. He got me to thinking. What if I rejected that religion and my daughter died? Wouldn’t I regret it for the rest of my life, thinking, “I wish I had taken faith in it. She might have been cured”? I must be free of any regret when I die. All right, I decided, I would take faith in Nichiren Shoshu for the sake of my poor child.

Nichiren Shoshu is the true Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. At first I had no idea why it was “true,” but I didn’t care as long as it was powerful enough to cure my child’s illness. Now, as I look back, I realize that had it not been for my paralyzed daughter, I would not be what I am today. To me she was what Buddhism terms a *zenchishiki* or good influence.

The direct cause for my conversion was my ailing daughter. Viewed from a broader perspective, however, there were other factors, too. My mother died when I was three. When I was twenty, my grandfather died, leaving a huge debt. All our property changed hands. My son died four days after birth. Then my daughter was born, handicapped by an incurable disease. All these misfortunes, I think, combined to make me take faith in true Buddhism. I’m convinced that all of them—my

mother, my grandfather, my son, my daughter—appeared in this world in order to lead me to the Gohonzon.

As long as you maintain an indestructible faith, you will never fail to transform adversity into happiness, just like poison changed into medicine. I was in the depths of misery when I took faith in the Gohonzon. Since then I have continued to struggle along the path of faith, abiding by my seniors’ guidance, gritting my teeth in the face of many hardships. Now I find myself progressing slowly but steadily each day, filled with boundless gratitude for the Gohonzon.

No matter what occurs, you should continue to chant daimoku and propagate our faith. Then you can elevate your life-condition and overcome unhappiness. This is what it means to surmount difficulties through your faith and overcome your own weakness. This is what will lead to a harmonious family. The time will certainly come when you will be able to say with gratitude, “Because we have maintained our faith in the Gohonzon, we are now immeasurably happy.”

In this book, the NSIC Editorial Department staff have translated and edited my guidance about faith and practice based on my own forty years’ experience in the Soka Gakkai. I sincerely hope it will help you to deepen your faith and thus receive even greater benefit from the Gohonzon. I would also like to express my appreciation to the staff of the NSIC Editorial Department for their efforts.

CHAPTER I

Some Basic Guidelines

Proper Attitude

I'VE been to various parts of the world. No matter which country I visit, the people express the same wish: "I want to be happy." This is a desire common to people all over the globe. However, when it comes to Buddhism—the religion which can fulfill that desire—many of them complain that not enough study material is translated, or that it is difficult to grasp.

I always reply to them: "The only language I speak is Japanese. I don't know how to say 'sugar' in German or French, but I've discovered that sugar in any country is sweet. I didn't have to learn how to say it in this language or that in order to discover its sweetness. Whether or not you understand the language, it is an indisputable fact that sugar is sweet wherever you go. Translation is of course essential and greater effort is now being made in that direction. However, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is a universal teaching. Whatever language you happen to speak, the Gohonzon will give you benefits, no matter in which country you live."

I once went to a certain country on a guidance tour. There a woman member came to me to seek advice. She did not seem to have practiced her faith very earnestly. She had secretly saved up a part of the household allowance, but her husband had discovered it, and a bitter quarrel had ensued. A headstrong woman, she had not spoken to her husband, done the laundry or prepared meals for an entire year. In the meantime she

began to chant a million daimoku, single-mindedly praying for a divorce.

I met her the day after she had completed her goal of a million daimoku. "I've heard that in this religion no prayer will go unanswered," she said. "So why hasn't mine been answered?"

I told her that prayers which will make one happy are fulfilled, but that those which would make one unhappy are not. What would happen if all wishes, both well- and ill-intended, were answered? I asked her, "You say you have chanted a million daimoku for a divorce, but how many daimoku have you chanted for your husband to take faith?" She replied that she had chanted none.

"Is it because you have a bad husband that you are suffering?" I asked her. "No, it isn't. It's because you have the karma to suffer on account of your husband. You say you have a bad husband, but you don't seem to realize that you haven't exactly been a good wife to him, either."

Then I told her about the Ikegami brothers who lived in Nichiren Daishonin's day. Their father strongly opposed their faith. In that respect, he was certainly a bad father. But why did the brothers have to undergo such fierce opposition? According to the Gosho, it was in order that they could change their destiny. Their father's opposition was in this sense a *zenchishiki* to them. People complain about their parents or spouses, but they themselves are the ones who are miserable. Buddhism views everything from the standpoint of the individual himself. If you are unhappy, it is because you

yourself made some cause for that unhappiness, whether in this lifetime or a previous one. However, when people are complaining about others, they aren't considering that they themselves may have created some bad karma in the past. That's why they don't even think of apologizing to the Gohonzon for that, but merely go on resenting their spouses or parents.

Finally I said to her, "Apologize to the Gohonzon for your past conduct, and pray for your husband to take faith in true Buddhism."

On the following morning the woman came to the airport in a hired car to see me off. "Thank you very much for your guidance last night," she said. "When I went home, knelt before the Gohonzon and chanted daimoku, I started crying and couldn't stop."

"You have been a selfish wife and an inconsiderate mother," I said to her. "If you practice your faith earnestly, you will not only become a good wife and a good mother, you will also grow into an indispensable asset for the movement of *kōsen-rufu*. When you go home, apologize to your children, too."

She looked embarrassed. "I have to apologize to my children, too?" she asked. She repeated the question two more times. I told her that any parent would apologize to his child if he stepped on its foot by mistake. Certainly no parent would refuse to do so simply because it was his own child.

The woman said that she found it difficult to apologize to her children. So I said to her, "If you chant daimoku to the Gohonzon and look at yourself, you will find yourself saying 'I'm sorry' to them quite naturally."

She promised me that she would strive in her human revolution so that she would be able to report her positive growth to me.

After I returned to Japan, I received a letter from her. She said that as soon as she came home from the airport, she prepared a meal and set it on the table, but her husband would not even touch it. Apparently she had not yet said "I'm sorry" to him. How could any husband accept a meal without an apology from a wife who had not spoken to him for an entire year!

She had not yet apologized to her children, she wrote, but when she told them all of what I had said to her, their attitude toward her changed a hundred and eighty degrees. The letter was filled with her determination to make a totally new start in faith.

This example shows how important it is to pray sincerely to the Gohonzon so that we can discern our destiny from a correct perspective, with the awareness that our own reformation is the key to solving all problems.

Internal Cause and External Cause

EVERYONE has some worry or other. Some people are troubled by their spouses, others by their children, and still others by sickness. The purpose of faith is to correct the fundamental causes which bring about such suffering. You will never succeed in improving the situation as long as you only try to change the effect.

As the Gosho states, "If you try to treat someone's illness without knowing what the cause of the illness is, you will only make the person sicker than before."*

No matter what your problem is, it is an effect. An effect invariably means that there was both an internal cause and an external cause which worked together to bring about that effect. An internal cause alone will not produce an effect, nor can an external cause by itself create an effect. Suppose we have a seed (internal cause). It will never sprout (effect) unless it is watered (external cause). Conversely, no matter how much water we may pour, nothing will sprout if there is no seed.

Since worry is an effect, there must be both internal and external causes which have combined to produce that effect. However, many people fail to realize that the fundamental cause lies within themselves, and instead blame others for acting as an obstacle. Suppose you are troubled by a tyrannical husband or a defiant child. Why did you have to marry such a man or bear such a child? It is because *you* have the destiny to suffer because of your husband or child. Until you understand this, you won't be able to understand Buddhism, either.

The cause for your present suffering lies in the past. You may have hurt your spouse or child in a past life (cause); therefore you yourself are being hurt by them in the present (effect). It is vital to realize this. President Toda once gave guidance to a member who had a polio-stricken child. Was he suffering because of the child?

* *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. I (Tokyo: Nichiren Shoshu International Center, 1979), p. 193 (hereafter cited as *Major Writings*).

No, the child was only the external cause. He himself also had the karma or internal cause to have a sick child in his family. He was the one who felt the agony and who wanted to be released from it. If he would strengthen his faith and practice, President Toda said, then he himself could change his destiny, and his trouble would consequently be solved.

One day, a woman came to me to seek guidance. Her husband had been diagnosed as having cancer. She had prayed single-mindedly to the Gohonzon for him to recover, but up to that time his condition had shown no improvement.

"I gather your husband's practice is rather weak," I said to her. "While it is only natural to want your husband to get well, just praying for the recovery of someone who doesn't practice is like praying for a person who refuses to eat to be full and satisfied. If we could obtain benefits without practicing ourselves, then very few of us would practice earnestly; we could ask someone else to chant on our behalf.

"Strictly speaking, you cannot change your husband's karma. However, you can change your bad karma to suffer on account of your husband's illness. At the same time pray for your husband to be motivated by this illness to practice sincerely, and to become a person who can contribute toward *kōsen-rufu* in some way or other. This is what your attitude should be. You should earnestly pray to the Gohonzon, apologizing for any past negligence, and pledge to strive even more from now on. This is the correct way to practice faith."

From that day on, the woman offered sincere

prayers to the Gohonzon, examining her past attitude toward her faith. Then her husband's condition began to improve little by little. In one month he had recovered so much that he was allowed to spend weekends at home. Each time he returned to the hospital, the doctor was astonished to see his patient in much better health than before. The doctor, of course, did not know that he was chanting daimoku. "Tell me," he would ask the man, "just what kind of food are you getting at home?" This story tells us that, in the final analysis, the key to solving all our problems lies in changing our own bad karma for the better.

Change Your Own Karma

MANY people who come to see me for guidance complain of their unhappiness and blame others—their husbands, wives, in-laws, children, leaders, this or that—indeed, everyone and everything but themselves. Virtually no one feels that his suffering is his own fault. Each and every one believes that he or she alone is entirely blameless.

A problem, no matter what kind, is an effect produced by the combination of an internal and an external cause. Here is a glass of water. Let's suppose that there is some sediment at the bottom. If you stir the contents, the water will become dirty. In this case, the sediment is the internal cause and the act of stirring is the external cause. Suppose we have a man and wife who lead a

cat-and-dog existence. Each insists that the other is to blame. It's like saying, "Because you stirred the water, it became dirty." But no matter how hard you stir, if there is no sediment the water will remain clear. People often fail to notice the sediment and simply accuse others of stirring up the water. In other words, they are not aware that the cause of their unhappiness lies within themselves and that they are merely experiencing the effect of that cause after it has been activated by someone else. In a quarrel, husband blames wife and wife accuses husband. No one ever gets into a fight thinking, "It's my own fault."

One day, President Toda was giving individual guidance at his office in Ichigaya, Tokyo. A woman complained, "My mother-in-law is perverse, malicious and will not change her ways no matter how often I ask her." She called the older woman all the names she could think of. "As young as you are, you are still unable to correct your *own* disposition," the president said to her. "How, then, can you expect your aged mother-in-law to change hers?" He went on to give her detailed guidance. Finally, the woman realized that the fundamental source of the problem was not her mother-in-law, but she herself. When she returned home, she found that her mother-in-law's attitude toward her had undergone a profound change for the better.

The above principle applies to all other problems as well. It is not your mate, your children or your parents who are to blame. First of all, you must change your own bad karma. That is the purpose of our faith. As long as you only complain about your spouse or children,

you'll never be able to solve your trouble. You must first consider why you are being hurt by them. Suppose you have a delinquent child. Fundamentally it is because you have the bad karma to be hurt by your child; this is the consequence of your negative causes formed in the past. Secondly, it is because you have assumed an incorrect attitude toward your faith, in not recognizing your own responsibility but simply blaming your child. If you change your bad karma which causes you to suffer on account of your child, he will change of his own accord. People whose children cause them heartache put the blame on them but, as I see it, the accusers are often more at fault than the accused.

The important thing is for you to recognize that your own bad karma is the cause of your unhappiness and pray for it to be changed. As the Goshō states, "Even a small offense will destine one to the evil paths if one does not repent of it. But even a great slander can be eradicated if one repents of it."* You should squarely face your problems and wholeheartedly chant to the Gohonzon, apologizing for whatever offenses or slanders you may have committed in this and previous lifetimes. Then you must take action—that is, practice—in order to overcome them. If you do so there will be no destiny or karma which cannot be changed.

Suppose you have a debt of a million yen. If you have little money, you can't possibly repay it, but if you are told that if you return only 30,000 or 50,000 yen, the rest of the debt will be cancelled, you can pay it off

**Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshū* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1952), p. 930 (hereafter cited as *Goshō Zenshū*).

with relative ease. This illustrates the principle of lessening one's karmic retribution. What you have borrowed, you must return. You create a cause, and therefore you must receive its effect. However, through the blessings of your faith, you can experience the effects of your bad karma much more lightly. You will be able to overcome all karmic retribution, no matter how serious, and enter into the happiest state of life.

Personal Wishes

I AM sure that each and every one of you has something or other which worries you. Worry arises when your wishes are not realized. You feel happy when your wishes are fulfilled, and you find yourself troubled when they are not. A certain leader admonished a member, saying, "When you face the Gohonzon, you must not pray for your personal wishes. You must pray single-mindedly for the attainment of *kōsen-rufu*." The member later came to me and asked whether or not that guidance was correct.

This is what I think. Some people are concerned *only* with their own personal wishes and desires. It is important to remind these people that one should pray, not only for personal matters, but also for *kōsen-rufu*. On the other hand, some members take too casual an attitude toward their everyday lives, believing that since they are praying for the realization of *kōsen-rufu*, their own problems will all be solved automatically. Such people often

begin to harbor doubts and ask, "I am always praying for *kōsen-rufu*. Why doesn't my personal situation improve?"

President Toda used to teach us in the following way: "Suppose you put rice and water in a pot, and then chant to the Gohonzon that it will cook. No matter how long you chant, you'll never get boiled rice." By this he was refuting the mistaken idea that benefits will come our way of themselves, if we only chant daimoku and make no further effort. We chant in order to gain wisdom—the wisdom which tells us to light the stove first and which helps us adjust the amount of water and the strength of the fire so that we can boil rice which is neither too hard nor too soft.

True, we should sincerely pray for *kōsen-rufu*. However, as long as we take an easygoing attitude, thinking that things will improve automatically, they rarely will. If we are to work for *kōsen-rufu*, our own lives must be established on a firm foundation, which we must do our utmost to construct. It is necessary, then, that we pray both for the attainment of *kōsen-rufu* and for the solution of our own personal problems when we face the Gohonzon.

Inconspicuous Benefits

I OCCASIONALLY meet people who complain, "I've been chanting, but I'm not getting any benefits." As long as you earnestly practice your faith, it is absolutely

impossible not to receive any benefits. We cannot judge the Gohonzon's power merely by our own limited vision.

The eyes of common mortals are totally unreliable. They are limited in that, even when they are wide open, they can only see immediate benefits and cannot perceive the profound ones. For instance, if you happen to be involved in a serious traffic accident but emerge with only slight injuries, you offer your heartfelt gratitude to the Gohonzon. However, when the day ends uneventfully and you return home safe and sound, you grumble, "Nothing good happened to me today." This is the way of us common mortals.

When you recover from illness, you are overjoyed at receiving a benefit. However, when you have passed five or ten years without falling ill, you think nothing of it. You forget to thank the Gohonzon. You do not realize what a blessed thing it is to remain healthy for such a long time. In other words, we tend to fail to appreciate the Gohonzon's power unless we are involved in an accident, become ill or experience some other difficulty. Which is the greater benefit: to encounter misfortune and overcome it, or not to have any misfortune whatsoever? It goes without saying that the latter is far greater.

Buddhism terms readily visible but small benefits as "conspicuous," and invisible but great benefits as "inconspicuous." Small benefits are easy to recognize, but the great benefits take time before you notice them. What is an inconspicuous benefit like? Let me give you an analogy. Looking at me now, it is perhaps hard for you

to imagine, but I was very good-looking in my younger days. Each morning I woke up to find that I looked the same as I had the day before. This has gone on for days, months and years up until today. During all this time, there was not a single day on which I perceived any significant change in my appearance. However, now I am apparently a far cry from what I looked like as a boy, as far as my head is concerned at any rate. It's not like I woke up one morning to find my thick, beautiful hair completely gone.

This will help you understand inconspicuous benefits, but don't think that this is my inconspicuous benefit. It's just a story to illustrate my point. What I'm trying to say is that you should understand that something great is happening as long as you sincerely continue your faith, even when you don't recognize it. By maintaining pure faith for five, ten, fifteen years and so on, before you realize it you will have arrived at a completely happy state of life—one you could not even have imagined. This is inconspicuous benefit. It often happens that what seems to be disaster on the surface proves in the long run to have been a great benefit. The power of the Gohonzon—the power of the Buddha and of the Law—is absolute. Whether or not we can call forth that power depends on our powers of faith and practice. Please tell your members to exert themselves, never doubting the Gohonzon's power no matter what may occur, and always be convinced of the great blessings which will accrue from their practice.

Attitude during Gongyo

THE posture we assume during gongyo is an expression of our faith in the Gohonzon. It is important that we assume a dignified posture, which is both fresh and solemn. You should sit with your back straight, while your eyes, filled with gratitude, look straight at Nam-myoho-rence-kyo inscribed down the center of the Gohonzon. During the silent prayers, keep your palms joined and bow your head naturally.

Gongyo and chanting constitute the basis of our faith, the prime point for accomplishing our objective—that is, our human revolution, the attainment of Buddhahood in this lifetime. Therefore, it is only natural to observe gongyo in the most respectful manner and with an earnest attitude. Bearing this in mind, please strive to improve your gongyo accordingly.

When two or more persons observe gongyo together, the participants should recite the sutra and chant daimoku in complete harmony with the one who leads. This is vital from the viewpoint of the principle of *itai dōshin* (many in body, one in mind). Suppose that all members of the family begin the day by doing morning gongyo together. Even if your child belatedly joins somewhere in the middle of gongyo, he does not need to start from the first prayer. The fervent prayer of the parent will complement the part which the child missed, so great is the power of the Gohonzon. However, if your child, taking advantage of this, makes it a habit

to join in late, you should of course correct him.

Even if your child joins toward the end of gongyo, he only has to do the remaining part and end it with the others, provided he is still very young. If he is of high school age or older, he should follow the others until they have finished, then start from the beginning or chant daimoku a little longer to compensate for the part he missed.

When You've Been Drinking

GONGYO is the solemn ceremony during which we are in the presence of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. It is undesirable, therefore, to observe it under the influence of alcohol. In our everyday life, however, it sometimes occurs that, for business or other reasons, we cannot avoid drinking. In such cases, we should remind ourselves of the sacred nature of gongyo and observe it in a way appropriate to each situation.

For instance, if you have been drinking heavily, your manner during gongyo may tend to be careless and haphazard. This is highly disrespectful. At such times, you should only chant daimoku three times or, if your condition permits, a hundred times or more. The next morning, do gongyo even more earnestly than usual, determined to compensate for what you missed the night before. In case you have a hangover, relinquish the role of leading gongyo to someone else. However, even if you have been drinking, should your conscious-

ness remain clear with nothing hindering you from behaving normally, observe gongyo in the usual manner; you need not be overly anxious about it.

There is one thing you must avoid—an easygoing attitude which rationalizes, “Since I have a job of this nature, I can’t help it if I drink and therefore cannot do gongyo properly.” The vital thing is to maintain the strong awareness that you are a messenger of the Mystic Law. Then you will not allow yourself to drink so much that you cannot observe gongyo.

Even if your condition does not permit you to do gongyo, you should not justify yourself by saying, “I won’t do gongyo tonight because they say I shouldn’t when I’m drunk.” Rather, it is all the more reason to apologize sincerely to the Gohonzon.

Springboard for Happiness

HOW should you give guidance to a member who is confronted with serious trouble? First of all, you yourself must have full confidence in the passage from the Gosho which states, “Great misfortune is always followed by great good fortune.”* No matter how great the member’s misfortune may appear to be, the question is whether you yourself fully believe this principle of the Mystic Law. You may suspect that since his trouble is so serious, it may not be followed by great good

*Gosho Zenshū, p. 1300.

fortune. That is not believing in this principle at all. The passage does not say, “Great misfortune is always followed by great good fortune, but super-great misfortune is not.”

If one of your members is faced with a serious problem, you must emphasize the above passage and sincerely try to convince him of the Gohonzon’s power. His victory or defeat, so to speak, lies in whether or not he can bring himself to believe in this teaching. If he takes faith in it, then all he has to do is practice exactly as the Daishonin teaches.

There is no problem whatsoever which cannot be turned into a springboard for happiness, no poison which cannot be changed into medicine. Even if one fails in business, he will be able to recover as long as he maintains his faith. It often happens, however, that when one fails in business, he also allows himself to fail in faith. This is something about which we must be careful.

Another important thing is to discern what each member is relying on. When some serious trouble occurs, one may tend to be shaken and turn to someone or something else for support. The other day, an assistant group chief came to see me. It was several days before a special discussion meeting scheduled to be held in commemoration of some anniversary. She was on the verge of tears as she related, “Although the meeting is drawing near, my group chief will not participate in activities. I visit his house every day and prod him, but he simply will not move an inch.”

“You have made your group chief, not the Gohonzon, the basis of your efforts,” I pointed out to her. “You

should reflect on your attitude in trying to rely on something other than the Gohonzon. Then, pray to hold as successful a discussion meeting as any other group whose chief and assistant chief are working in harmony. I think you forgot this spirit. That is the core of your problem."

If any of your members has a serious problem, remind him that before complaining about his predicament, he should chant and chant, no matter what may occur or what difficulty may face him. Convince him that this in itself will open a way to the solution of his problem.

Priorities in Faith

SOME members say, "I'm too busy right now. I'll participate in activities when I have less work to do." We leaders tend to sympathize with them and leave things at that, but that is not giving guidance at all. Such people are like someone with an injured leg who, urged to go and see a doctor, says, "I cannot go because I have a broken leg. I'll go when I'm able to walk again." He fails to realize that precisely because he cannot walk, he should go consult a doctor. Likewise, those unable to engage in activities because of financial or business pressures should pray all the more fervently to solve such difficulties and strive to participate, no matter how infrequently.

Several years ago I met a jeweler. His wife was an

enthusiastic member, but he himself was not doing any activities at all. He said he had to work until nine or ten every evening. "You say you are too busy to participate in activities," I said to him. "But, certainly, you are allowed at least one day off each month. You are busy on all the other days. This is all the more reason why you should pray wholeheartedly that you'll be able to devote yourself fully to activities on your day off. Then, live up to that determination. That is the only way you'll be able to grow in faith."

Thus, when giving guidance to your members, you should not just sympathize with their troubles but try to make them call forth their powers of faith and practice. Through our conversation, the jeweler came to realize that his attitude toward faith had been wrong. He began to participate in activities as much as his work permitted. Now he is one of the top leaders in a ward in Tokyo. Please bear in mind what I've said when giving guidance.

Accumulate Experience

FROM time to time I hear a leader bewail his lack of ability to give guidance. No matter what one may attempt to do, he will face difficulty in the early stages. No one is master of his art from the very beginning. Nor can one always develop his ability simply because he has a lot of time to practice or because he has spent months and years in his endeavor. The key is your eagerness. You must first awaken your eagerness, and

then master the fundamental principles of giving guidance in faith.

You may meet a mother worried about a child who refuses to go to school. You may encounter a wife anxious about her husband who will not take faith. No matter what the trouble may be, the principles in giving guidance are always the same. Once you acquire them, you can apply them to any problem. Giving guidance is an act of mercy. It also helps you grow as a human being.

Another thing you should bear in mind is that you cannot expect to grow in faith merely by receiving guidance. You must accumulate experiences of your own. Suppose your child is learning to ride a bicycle. No matter how elaborately you explain the technique to him, he will never acquire the knack of it until he actually gets on the bicycle, limps along, falls down a few dozen times, gets up and tries again. Likewise, no matter how difficult a problem your member may face, you should help him squarely tackle and resolve it. This will give you invaluable experience, which you can apply with conviction to any other problem of a similar nature. You should not think of a member with a problem as causing you hardship, for he is a precious *zenchishiki* (good influence) that can help you change your destiny.

You don't need to be disheartened, even if few of your members participate in activities. Trying to awaken inactive members is important, of course, but it is just as vital to consider how you can further develop those few who are active. Suppose your group consists of ten

members, of whom only three are active. In such a case, you can, for example, ask each of these three to take care of one of the inactive members. Since they now have their own roles to play, they will become even more enthusiastic in activities than before. If the combinations you set up at first do not go well, you can always change them around. Try any methods you can think of in order to strengthen your group.

Your visits to your members may not always end successfully. You may call on a member who has ceased to practice, and come out feeling discouraged because he failed to respond. If you carry your feeling of frustration with you to your next destination, deciding that this other person probably won't understand either, then you will not be able to give guidance which will move his life. You must call forth your faith and dispel your sense of disappointment, resolved that this time you will succeed without fail. Everybody has some worry or other. To discern what the problem is and give appropriate encouragement—this is the key to providing convincing guidance.

According to my experience, a leader who only gives guidance at meetings and does not make home visits is prone to incur the ill feelings of his members. This is because there is a lack of communication. On the other hand, a leader who frequently visits his members and takes good care of them is assured of steady personal growth. I hope you will fully exert yourselves in your activities, praying that each of your members will advance vigorously toward the goal of *kōsen-rufu*.

Unity Is Crucial

WHAT should you, as a relatively young district chief, do to ensure harmony in your district? First of all, you must see to it that the members of each group unite in support of their chief. You must not attempt to play the central role yourself, but always assist the group chiefs so that they may find it easier to carry out their activities. Then all the group chiefs, even those who may be older than you, will come to unite with you at the center.

When you make home visits, depending on the circumstances, you may be well advised to bring along a group chief or a member who is older than you. The presence of elder members is an invaluable asset which facilitates district activities. If you are at a loss as to what guidance to give a member, you can ask one of your senior leaders to go with you. You must be careful, however, not always to depend on your senior leaders for assistance, or you yourself will not grow or develop your capability. Don't forget that you are the one responsible for building a firm basis for your district. With this awareness constantly in mind, work in harmony with the group chiefs in giving guidance, so that those who have not been practicing will begin to do gongyo and participate in the discussion meetings, and those who have been nurturing ill feelings toward other members can reflect upon themselves.

Just because you are the district chief does not mean

that you may lord it over the other leaders and members. The Soka Gakkai is an organization through which the members give and receive guidance, not one through which to exercise authority. If a father tries to force his children to obey by exercising his parental authority, they will resist him. Education specialists say that this is because children seek a counselor and not a tyrant in their father. A similar principle applies to personal relationships within a district. You must strictly refrain from flaunting your position as district chief in dealing with your members. Even though your words may not be overbearing, if you are inclined toward authoritarianism, it will show in your behavior.

Some of your members may be difficult to convince. Persist in giving them guidance, bearing in mind that because of them, you can advance your own human revolution. Be considerate about their respective situations. Ponder what you can do to make it easier for them to participate in activities and give them proper advice. Then, any gap which may have existed between you and your members will be bridged.

Complaining Solves Nothing

ONCE a member of the men's division casually said to me, "My illness has improved considerably, but I have not yet completely recovered." So I said to him, "'But' is a word you often use when you complain. Unless you stop complaining, you will not be able to receive any

more benefit. If you praise someone or thank him and then follow it with a 'but,' you are not praising him or thanking him at all.

"Suppose you visit someone and the host serves you tea. If you said, 'You served me a cup of tea, but you failed to give me a second cup,' it would be very rude. On the other hand, if you say, 'This is superb tea. Could I have another cup, please,' the host will gladly comply with your request. It will be most impolite to the Gohonzon if you follow your thanks with a 'but.' Since you have gotten much better, you should first thank the Gohonzon for it. Then, since you have not yet been completely cured, pray to the Gohonzon for a perfect recovery. Don't confuse the two."

The man replied, "I understand. From today on I'll never say 'but.'" "Of course you won't," I said, "but what are you going to do about all the 'buts' you have said up until today?" This is the point most members seem to have difficulty in grasping. Suppose a person steals many things from other people and then says, "I am very sorry. I did it on impulse. I will never steal again." No matter how much he may apologize, unless he returns the things he stole, he will not be able to compensate for his crime.

A passage in the Goshō states, "Even a small offense will destine one to the evil paths if one does not repent of it. But even a great slander can be eradicated if one repents of it."* Another passage reads, "These people seemed to have repented, but apparently they had not

*Goshō Zenshū, p. 930.

repented profoundly enough."* Without action, that is, practice, you will not be able to erase your misdeeds, even should you repent of them. The law of cause and effect is strict. What you stole, you must return. If you abuse other people, you too will be spoken ill of. If you harass others, you will be harassed in return. This is what Buddhism teaches us. It is therefore important that you pledge to the Gohonzon that from now on you will do your best in whatever respect, and then be true to your word.

Find the Basic Cause

SOME of the younger leaders of the men's division say that they find it difficult to give guidance because they have little experience or because many of their members are older than they. Do we need to have much experience in order to give guidance in faith? I don't think so. Of course it is desirable to have lots of experience, but even if we don't, we can still give good guidance.

To give guidance in faith means to tell your member, from the Buddhist point of view, where the cause of his problem lies and how he should tackle it, so that he will try to solve it on the basis of faith. Most people attribute their troubles to someone or something outside themselves. They are not aware that they themselves are responsible for creating those problems, and that they

*Ibid., p. 1523.

are part of their own karma. In other words, they fail to realize that they must first change their own destiny to suffer those problems. Hence their inability to find a fundamental solution.

In order to give guidance to such people, what is required is not so much a wide range of experience as for you yourself to return to the fundamentals of faith and deepen your own faith. The only way to do this is to pray earnestly to the Gohonzon. By emphasizing your lack of experience, you are simply trying to save face in case you fail to give excellent guidance. Unless you take a more constructive attitude, you will never be able to give good guidance in faith, no matter how much experience you accumulate.

Suppose a member comes to us, says that he has some disease and needs a surgical operation, and asks what he should do. Now, we are not doctors; we are not in a position to tell him whether he should undergo the operation or not. What we can do, instead, is to tell him about the cause of illness from the Buddhist standpoint.

Second President Toda used to say, "Suppose a member falls seriously ill. If he falters in faith, he may not recover, no matter how skilled his doctor may be. On the other hand, if he has a firm faith, he will improve even though he may consult a quack." When giving guidance in such cases, the most important point is to let the sick member realize that his suffering stems from his own life, and that the only way to change it fundamentally is to chant daimoku. When a member has a complicated problem, even leaders with many years of

faith sometimes tend to see only the surface and fail to discern the fundamental cause. We should avoid forming hasty conclusions in such cases.

I have one piece of advice for younger leaders who are newly appointed. They are apt to think that the members who are older than they are now *under* them. Of course I realize that most of them know it is wrong to regard their positions in terms of a superior-subordinate relationship. However, when they say it is difficult to give guidance because of their lack of experience, it is often because they inwardly feel that they are now *above* their members. Positions in the Soka Gakkai are an indicator of responsibility, not of rank or power. The higher your position, the greater your responsibility. Please do not be confused about this point.

The Role of Leaders

LET us consider what it means to be a district chief. As I said before, positions in the Soka Gakkai are a yardstick of responsibility. The group chief, the district chief, the chapter chief—each has his own responsibility to discharge. To be promoted from group chief to district chief means only that you must shoulder that much more responsibility. Even though you have become a district chief, don't think that you have risen to greatness or that the vice district chief, who used to be your senior, is now your subordinate. If you think this way, you will face difficulties in carrying out your activities.

As district chief, you have the responsibility to teach each member in your district the greatness of faith in the Gohonzon and lead him to happiness. They are not your subordinates in any way. The organization of the Soka Gakkai is essentially different from that of a company. It is a gross mistake to think you are the greatest person in your district or to try to order your members about.

I repeat—don't think you are above your members. Instead, think this way: "I am younger and more energetic than others. That's why I've been assigned a larger range of activity." Each position entails a corresponding scope of activity. The larger the area, the greater and the heavier the responsibility.

When dealing with a member who was previously your senior, if you pity him because you have risen above him, that feeling will convey itself to him and may produce an undesirable effect. Instead, you should recognize his capability and try to enable him to give it full play. In my opinion, to be a district chief is nothing extraordinary. All you need to do is give advice to each group chief through the experience you acquired while you yourself were a group chief. What you should do as a district chief is to utilize your experience for developing each group in your district into a splendid body of people.

It is a mistake to think that your duty is to give orders and directions. Take the home, for example. Children hate to be ordered about by their parents. If the mother talks to her daughter as kindly as a sister would, the daughter will welcome her advice. But, if she exercises

her parental authority by trying to make her obey, the daughter will resist her. There will be even greater resistance in your district if you assume a high-handed manner. As long as you take the attitude that since you are the district chief and they are your members, they should accept whatever you say, your members will never be convinced. The third president, Mr. Ikeda, used to say that guidance means to give encouragement.

What does it mean to be an outstanding district chief? In the final analysis, I think it means to foster many outstanding group chiefs. This applies to all positions. An able chapter chief, for instance, is one who produces many able district chiefs. A capable group chief is one who, through his guidance, makes each member in his group strive to deepen his faith, practice and study. There must be something amiss if the district chief is great but none of his group chiefs is. To sum up, it is the district chief's duty to develop each group chief into an excellent leader and to help every member of his district to truly understand Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

However, theory is one thing, while practice is quite another. For instance, Soka Gakkai publications repeatedly stress the importance of gongyo, and that members should strictly observe gongyo both morning and evening. You would think that with so much emphasis placed on gongyo, no one would ever miss it. But, in reality, some members find it hard to do gongyo.

This is all the more reason why the responsibilities of the district chief and the group chief are both important and difficult to perform. If a schoolteacher dumps

all that he has ever learned on his students, he cannot expect to achieve good results. He should instead ponder how to impart his knowledge according to the different grades, and then prepare an effective curriculum.

Likewise, it is inadvisable for the district chief to deluge his members, irrespective of their different situations, with all that he has learned from his senior leaders or through his own experience. A district consists of many people who are in different circumstances—those who have joined only recently, those being swayed by their environment, those whose families oppose their faith, those too busy to participate in activities, those who bear grudges against a leader, and so on. As long as you feel that you have a hard time because of this or that member, you yourself will be unable to grow. Rather, accept it as an excellent chance to further your own growth. To treasure each and every member in your district, consider their problems as your own, find the solution together with them and encourage them—this is your mission as district chief. Therein lies the way for you to accumulate good fortune. I hope you will be convinced of this and proceed in your activities with confidence.

Introduce Members to Seniors

PARENTS and their children are always together. It sometimes happens that your child becomes too accustomed to your admonitions to listen to you but still

obeys his schoolteacher. So, in such a case, it is a good idea for you to ask the teacher to talk to the child. That is showing your mercy toward him. You should never scold him, shouting, "Who do you think has paid for your food and clothing up until today? How dare you disobey me and listen to a person who is not even your relative!"

This principle also applies to individual guidance. Suppose you are a district chief. You have given guidance to a certain member two or three times, but he still refuses to listen. The more you speak to him, the greater the ill feeling he harbors against you. In such a case, you might do better to ask a chapter-level leader to talk to him or take him with you to the headquarters chief. Never be so narrow-minded as to reproach a member or a group chief for passing over you in favor of a senior leader to seek guidance.

In the early days of the Soka Gakkai, members were advised to receive guidance from leaders two levels higher than they. The chapter chief was to give guidance and encouragement to group chiefs, the district chief to unit chiefs, and the group chief to unit members. I believe this principle is applicable even now. But one thing you should keep in mind is that the leader who is "in between" must be well aware of the circumstances of the member who seeks guidance from a higher leader. Otherwise, misunderstanding may arise.

Don't Blame Others

(To a woman who is worried about her husband not professing faith)

I'M sure you've heard the story of a man who was scared out of his wits at the sight of a withered tree. He felt so isolated and terrified walking through the darkness of night that, when he saw a tall tree swaying in the wind, he took it for a ghost. It was he who was terror-stricken, and it was his own timidity which caused that fear. In other words, he was both his own attacker and victim. It would have been no use suing the tree, for trees have no inherent power to frighten people. If they did, we would never be able to admire their beauty.

I cited this story because I want you to understand that whether or not you can solve your problem with your husband depends on your own determination. Right now you feel it is his fault that you cannot participate in activities. However, his opposition is only the external cause; there is also an internal cause within yourself. Viewed from this principle, you have the bad karma to suffer on account of your husband. In order to change your problem, there is no other alternative but to grapple squarely with it. It is precisely because your husband is not yet a member that you must strengthen your faith and pray to the Gohonzon so that you will be able to do activities together with him as soon as possible.

You say your husband is strong in his obstinacy. Conversely speaking, this means that you are weak.

I don't mean that you should be equally obstinate in arguing with him, but rather, that you should be strong in your determination to challenge your own destiny. Don't bear a grudge against your husband. Rather, become someone he can trust. Fundamentally, you must change your own karma. When you exert yourself toward realizing your human revolution and take responsibility for your family's happiness, your husband will inevitably come to recognize the great power of the Mystic Law and eventually take faith in it.

Good Influence

IN the practice of faith we should be careful not to lapse into force of habit. We must constantly renew our determination and assume a fresh, positive approach. Sometimes you may find it hard to participate in activities because you have much work to do, because you are in financial straits, or because you are busy with household chores or with your children. However, it is precisely because of such difficulties that you should resolve to chant daimoku all the more earnestly, bringing forth your Buddha wisdom to change your situation for the better.

An employee cannot get paid unless he goes to his company and performs his job. Then, what about our practice of faith? Do we receive a month's worth of benefit if we engage in activities for thirty days straight, and three days' worth of benefit if we do activi-

ties only for three days? We know that this is not true. You've probably heard the story in the Goshō of a woman who, having no money, cut off her hair, sold it, obtained a small amount of oil and burned it as an offering to the Buddha. A strong wind blew and extinguished all the gorgeous lamps donated by the wealthy, but the woman's humble lamp continued to burn throughout the night. No matter how busy your work is or how financially pressed you may be, you must determine to find even a little time to fight for *kōsen-rufu* and repay your debt of gratitude to the Gohonzon. This is a major cause for accumulating good fortune.

Let's assume that every weekday you must stay late at work, or that you must be out of town on business six days a week. Most people's tendency is to be overcome by the situation at hand and say they are just too busy to participate in activities. In such cases, however, it is important to chant daimoku to the Gohonzon to be able to create the same value as a full week's activities in the one or two days available to you. By so doing, you will eventually achieve a state of life in which you can devote as much of your time as you please to activities.

True, all living things possess the Buddha nature, but it will not manifest itself unless it comes into contact with a good influence. No seed will sprout if it is not covered with earth. The seed is the internal cause, and earth is the external cause. These two combine to produce the effect—the sprouting. In Buddhism, an external influence which helps us manifest our Buddha nature is called a *zenchishiki* or good influence. In our

everyday life, we have various worries and troubles because of our mates, children, sickness, financial difficulties, and so on. When you chant daimoku and engage in *shakubuku* in order to resolve such agony and change your destiny, your distress will be transformed into a springboard for your human revolution. Then all your worries and troubles become *zenchishiki*. Don't be discouraged by difficulties and trials or let them be excuses for not participating in activities. Instead, make them causes for your growth and look at them in proper perspective. That is the correct way to practice faith.

Need for Sincerity

SOMETIMES members entertain grudges or ill feelings against each other. For instance, they resent their chapter chief for being too severe or their district women's chief for being too annoying. No one wants to be hated or incur enmity. Everyone wants to be spoken well of as a fine person. If you don't want to be criticized by your members, continue to give soft-worded, pleasant-sounding guidance. You go to see a member and ask whether he is doing gongyo regularly. He replies, "No. I'm too busy." You say, "I understand. Please do gongyo when you have time. Good-bye." You visit another member and urge him to study Buddhism. He says, "I don't like to study Buddhism, or anything else for that matter." You say, "I see. Well, if you should begin

to like it, then please study." As long as you speak in this way, you will never be disliked by your members, but neither will you receive any benefit. If you sincerely want to make them happy, you must speak to them in various ways, sometimes mildly and sometimes severely, as the situation demands.

In my early days of faith I heard nothing but the theory of value and the theory of negative effects. I thought the theory of negative effects must be the monopoly of the Soka Gakkai. Upon close examination, however, I've discovered that it is mothers who utilize this theory more often than anyone. They are always reminding their children of the negative effects which will be forthcoming if they fail to mind.

"If you run out into the street, you'll be hit and killed by a car."

"You'll have a stomachache if you eat so much."

"Be careful of the kettle, or you'll get scalded."

As we look back, we can appreciate that we survived safely because our mothers continued to warn us against doing this or doing that. If you let a baby do anything he pleases, he won't survive. Aside from the question of how they go about it, we can say that parents scold their children because they want them to grow up to be fine people. They would never admonish them if they didn't care what became of them. However, it is one thing to reprimand our children with their well-being uppermost in mind, and quite another to scold them out of frustration or emotion. The same holds true when we give guidance. If we lack sincere concern for their happiness, our members will not take our guidance to

heart, no matter how cleverly phrased it may be. For their own part, members will benefit if they can take their leaders' guidance not emotionally but as being given for their own sake.

While you were small, your parents probably used to give you a good scolding now and then. At the time, you must have felt it was a miserable thing to be a child. Now that you've grown up and have your own children, I'm sure you truly appreciate your parents, saying to yourselves, "Now I understand why they scolded me."

This also applies to leader-member relationships. Take, for instance, those members who resent their chapter chief for being too severe. They should understand that—aside from the question of whether or not he expresses himself tactfully—he gives them advice because he wants them to be happy.

A member may harbor a grudge against his leader when he receives severe guidance. But the more strictly he is reprimanded, the more grateful he will be when he comes to fully understand the greatness of faith. You may think of your district women's chief as being too annoying. But when you yourself are appointed to that position, you'll certainly begin to realize how sincere she was. I was no exception. I took faith only after fiercely opposing it for some time. For all that, when I came to understand how great this Buddhism is, I reproached the person who had introduced it to me, saying, "If you had been more insistent, I could have joined much earlier."

We must help new members understand faith by

taking good care of them, teaching them how to do gongyo and studying the Gosho together with them. We must resolve to bring happiness to our members as well as to ourselves. True happiness lies in making that determination and putting it into practice. I hope you will engage in giving guidance pleasantly and confidently, always with utmost thoughtfulness for your members.

Positive Attitude

IT is the way of common mortals to find fault with other people while failing to see their own faults. Let me cite the example of a woman I once heard about in order to illustrate my point. She was never very enthusiastic about her practice. The excuses she gave for her inactivity were legion: because her parents had not cared much about her education, because she got married, because she bore a child, because the child was still very young, because she had another child, because her children had to go to school, because she had to work to pay their school fees because her husband's salary was very low, because she was in ill health because of overwork, etc.

When her children had grown up, her excuses were: because they got married, because they had children, because she had to baby-sit them, and so on. She never realized that, precisely because of those reasons, she should have prayed to the Gohonzon all the more fer-

vently so that she would be able to participate in activities. She was a young woman when she took faith, and now she is a grandmother. All this time she has continued to say "because of this" or "because of that." Yet she always tells other members that they will never accumulate good fortune as long as they complain. She is a typical example of those people who fail to see themselves. When they cannot pass an examination, they say that they failed because they had too little time to study or because the questions asked were not from the materials they had studied.

The same holds true with the positions in the Soka Gakkai—say, the district chief. Suppose you have been appointed to that position. Now you will have to take care of many members. If you think, "Oh, what a hard time I'm going to have," your attitude toward faith is one of complaint. I don't think there is any district chief who took faith in order to attain that position. Most of them probably joined in order to solve some trouble or other. However, their missions required that they become district chiefs. If they don't feel equal to their position, that is all the more reason to pray earnestly to the Gohonzon to be able to fulfill that responsibility. This is the correct attitude toward faith.

Those who tend to get caught up in the past are apt to complain. But no matter how much they may complain, they will not be able to attain enlightenment in this lifetime or accomplish their human revolution. So, if you have time to complain, you would be much wiser to devote that time to chanting to the Gohonzon. With this attitude firmly established, you will be able

to lead a life of fulfillment, brilliant with the glory of your human revolution. I hope each and every one of you will continue your faith in the spirit of "start from now" throughout your lives.

Benefit and Loss

IN practicing faith it is important that we do not allow ourselves to be swayed by external influences. Some members leave the faith simply because other members are involved in a traffic accident or lose property in a fire. Isn't this acting a little too impetuously? Such people seem to believe that someone with faith should not die, get hurt, meet any accident or suffer loss in any way. Were that to be true, it would create terrible confusion in society. For instance, Soka Gakkai members would feel that they no longer need to stop for red lights because they could never have an accident or, even if they did, they could never get killed.

"How old are you, granny?"

"Three hundred and sixty-five."

A person's face already bears quite a few wrinkles at the age of sixty-five; what would it look like three hundred years later?

Refrigerators would sell poorly.

"Even if we eat spoiled food, we won't get sick because we practice faith."

"Since we have faith, we won't die even if we don't eat. Therefore we don't need to work."

Thus the world would be filled with lazy people. However, none of these things are in any way true.

Now, some members may protest, "Then it makes no difference whether we have faith or not, does it?" True, one's house may burn down, whether he practices faith or not. But we cannot tell just by looking at the immediate occurrence whether it is a benefit or loss. No incident can be categorically defined as benefit or loss in and of itself. Each phenomenon invariably contains the potential for either.

Suppose someone's house burns down. At the moment we cannot tell whether it is benefit or loss. What is important is how things will go after this mishap. Will he be able to live in a better house, or will he be reduced to living in a wretched shack? We need to wait for some time in order to determine whether that fire was a benefit or loss.

Both benefit and loss are divided into three kinds: major, medium and minor. Go ahead and take a minor loss if it promises a major benefit. On the other hand, avoid a minor benefit which entails a major loss. For example, one who drinks methyl alcohol obtains the minor "benefit" of becoming merry, which, however, is followed by a severe loss—that is, the loss of his sight. A thief may think he is doing well because he doesn't have to pay for the things he acquires, but the more he steals, the longer he must serve in prison.

As long as we continue our faith, we can change any kind of poison into medicine. Don't be defeated by any difficulty or swayed by any external influence. Instead, continually strengthen your faith so that you can turn

anyone and anything into a good influence, a springboard for you to advance toward your happiness.

Devilish Functions

THOSE functions which work to save people from misery and make them happy are called the functions of the "Buddha." On the other hand, those which try to block the functions of the "Buddha" and bring unhappiness to people are termed functions of "devils." Our own lives possess both these functions. Part of oneself urges him to act constructively while the other part tells him not to, because it's too troublesome.

I'm sure you remember how these two functions fought against each other before you decided to take faith. "Shall I start practicing?" "No, I'd better not." The question is which side wins. I know one member who kept saying to himself, "Shall I start practicing?" and "No, I'd better not," for no less than twelve years.

Then, does everything go smoothly once you surmount that first hurdle? Not exactly. Even after you take faith, two different voices continue to address you. On the evening of a discussion meeting, one of them keeps saying, "Let's go," while the other repeats, "Stay home." In the meantime it starts raining, and you finally decide not to go.

Devilish functions never announce, "I am a devil, sent here by the Devil of the Sixth Heaven." They are called devils precisely because, at first glance, they are not

identifiable as such. Therefore, if you are off your guard, you will fall easy prey to them.

At one place I visited, a couple came to seek my advice. They had brought their child with them. As soon as they were seated before me, they began to quarrel with each other. The husband said that his wife was a devil, so I said to him, "Then it follows that you are the husband of a devil and this child is the child of a devil. Isn't that correct?" As might have been expected, he was at a loss to answer.

In this man's case, neither his wife nor his child was to blame. It was his own negativity that was the source of his unhappiness. We use the word "devil" in Buddhism. However, it does not indicate an imaginary evil spirit or being such as those depicted in pictures but rather means the negative functions innate in life. We encounter the workings of these functions in our everyday lives. Devilish functions cease to work when we recognize them as such and defeat them through fervent prayer to the Gohonzon.

Refrain from *Onshitsu*

(To a district chief who finds himself caught between his senior leader and a group chief who harbors a grudge against that leader)

WE did not take faith in order to criticize our leaders. Criticism does not solve problems. Suppose your friend has financial problems. No matter how much you may

spout off about how poor he is, neither you nor he will become wealthy. The essential thing is for both of you to practice Buddhism to change your respective karmas for the better.

Some senior leaders may lack generosity and warmth, something which makes junior members feel antagonistic. However, nowhere in the Goshō does it say that, in such cases, you are justified in committing any of the fourteen slanders. If, for any reason whatsoever, you despise, hate, envy or resent other members, you are committing the last four of the fourteen slanders: disrespect of believers, hatred of believers, jealousy toward believers and grudges against believers. These are the causes which will block all the good fortune which you could otherwise accumulate. It is important to consider your present position from the viewpoint of faith, for faith is what we must maintain throughout our lives.

You say you are having a hard time, caught between the senior leader and the group chief. You should be convinced, however, that that very difficulty is an opportunity for you to grow. If, on the other hand, you let yourself be carried away by the situation and entertain ill feelings toward either or both of these two people, you will receive negative effects and cannot become happy. What, then, is the purpose of having continued your faith? Please give detailed guidance to this effect to the group chief, too. Even so, he may not easily understand. In that case, you have the Gohonzon to pray to. As long as you merely complain about the situation, you won't be able to solve the problem.

It is no use simply praying to the Gohonzon that this or that member correct his various faults. It is like saying, "That cat bothers me; it always scratches me badly. I think I'll cut off its claws." Now, a person who is afraid of a cat's claws is, figuratively speaking, a mouse of a man. If we become dogs, we will have no reason to fear cats; or, better still, we should become lions. What I'm trying to say is this: All of us are following the way of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. We should therefore regard all problems as so many potentially good influences and, using them as stimuli, strive for our human revolution, elevating our state of life even a little each day.

The third president, Daisaku Ikeda, once said: "... Yet, we are all human. There may be some senior leaders you do not like. There may be some members you cannot stand. Even if you are told to like them, there are times when you just cannot. I think that it is natural for you to dislike someone, but there is a difference between dislike and *onshitsu* [committing the last four of the fourteen slanders]. If you refuse to practice together with someone or refuse to listen to guidance about faith just because you don't like a certain person, that is *onshitsu*. . . ." We do not carry out activities for the sake of those whom we dislike; we do so in order to fulfill the mandate left us by Nichiren Daishonin. For this purpose, we should practice together even with those whom we dislike, utilize them as good influences for further polishing our character, and become excellent believers.

Let me add a few words here. When a member bears

a grudge against a leader, the leader may well be at fault, but the member is equally to blame. This member tends to think that he is one hundred percent right, and the other person one hundred percent wrong. Now, we know that this is not true. As I always say, Buddhism maintains that an effect is produced by the combination of an internal and an external cause. As long as the member fails to reflect upon the internal cause—his own inclination toward *onshitsu*—and only blames the external cause—the leader—there can be no solution to the problem. Nichiren Daishonin sternly forbids us to bear grudges against other believers, saying, “All those who keep faith in the Lotus Sutra are most certainly Buddhas, and one who slanders a Buddha commits a grave offense.”*

Of course, leaders must strictly avoid speaking or acting in such a way as may incur the antagonism of members. They must respect each and every member and be most sincere in their dealings with him. For their own part, those members who are apt to be swayed by external influences and bear grudges against their leaders must reflect upon their low life-condition and earnestly chant daimoku to elevate it. When one realizes that the basic cause of his unhappiness lies nowhere but in himself and that other people are merely influences, he is taking the first step toward his human revolution.

*Gosho Zenshū, p. 1382.

Proper Perspective

I WOULD like to tell you about a member of the young women's division in a certain country overseas. When she was a junior high school student, her father deserted his family. Anguished, her mother took faith in Nichiren Shoshu. The daughter understood almost nothing about Buddhism, but, profoundly impressed by her mother's earnestness, she began to chant daimoku with her every day.

Three months later, the culprit returned. Furthermore, through his wife and daughter's sincere *shakubuku*, he finally began to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism. Now, ten years later, the daughter has grown up to be a superb leader of the young women's division in her country. Her mother is also active as a leader of the women's division there.

Once I had a chance to meet this girl. I said to her, “To you, your father was *zenchishiki*, a good influence. You should not harbor ill feelings toward him but be grateful to him. If he had not disappeared, your mother would not have taken faith in Buddhism, and if she had not done so, neither would you. In that case, you could not possibly have attained your present state of life.” I added, “Had you not met the Gohonzon, you would probably have blamed your father for having made your mother unhappy and continued to hate him throughout your life. However, faith in the Gohonzon can change hatred into gratitude and make it the cause